Expanding Stadia's Bandwidth: A Preliminary Stakeholder Analysis of E-Sports Tournaments in Sport Arenas

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Introduction
Previous research has pointed out that traditional stakeholders involved in development and operation of large sport stadiums and arenas include team owners, sport leagues, business communities, media, politicians, proponent groups, opponent groups, competing cities, sport fans, neighborhood groups, lower income residents, and the general public (Friedman & Mason, 2004; Mason & Buist, 2013). However, a stakeholder map may change as a focal organization (in our case a sport venue) adopts new practices, brings in new stakeholders, and causes change to relationships with existing stakeholders (Xue & Mason, 2011). For example, in recent years large sport stadium and arena (e.g. Madison Square Garden and Staples Center) owners and managers have sought to capitalize on the rise of e-sports tournaments (e.g. League of Legends World Championship, The International Dota2 Championships, and World Cyber Arena) to attract new generations of event goers and new ticket sales (Dave, 2016).

The e-sports events and tournaments context may present unique stakeholder relations since the focal sport venue has to coordinate and balance diverse and even competing claims and interests between existing arena stakeholder groups and newly emerging e-sports related stakeholders (such as video game developers, e-sports event organizers, and e-sports fans) to achieve long-term development goals. This study will focus on exploring how existing stakeholders (i.e. traditional stakeholders of sport stadiums and arenas) interplay with emerging new stakeholders (i.e. e-sports stakeholders) and how the focal organization (i.e. sport venues) balance stakeholder interests in the e-sports events context. Specifically, we will develop a stakeholder map (1) to identify who are involved in e-sports tournaments and what their interests and influences are; (2) to compare the e-sports stakeholder map with traditional arena stakeholder map and to explore if any existing arena stakeholders are involved in the host of e-sports tournaments and how they interact with new e-sports stakeholders; and (3) to investigate how the focal sport venue balances and coordinates diverse needs and interests of e-sports and existing arena stakeholders.

The Context of E-sports and Sport Venues
E-sports, defined here as the playing of competitive digital games in a highly-structured format, have exhibited dramatic commercial growth and increasingly developed a set of spectator-oriented consumption practices (Seo, 2013). Within the emerging literature on e-sports, most research has focused on, among other subjects, e-sports history (Borowy & Jin, 2013), marketing, consumer needs, and consumption motivation (Seo, 2013; Weiss & Schiele, 2013; Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011), and the physical embodied aspects of e-sports (Witkowski, 2012; van Hilvoord & Pot, 2016). However, while the literature has addressed aspects of both e-sports consumer and player behavior, little has been written about the relational dynamics that form the in-person consumer environment engendered by e-sports tournaments.

Traditional sport venues have been studied both as a means of delivering consumptive experiences to attendees as well as expressions of local governance policies via regional economic strategies and local political philosophy (Lee et al., 2012; Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Friedman, Andrews, & Silk, 2004; Sam & Scherer, 2006). Stakeholder analyses on stadium subsidies show how important stakeholders such as politicians, business elites, professional teams, sport fans, community groups, and media institutions devise competing claims and exert influence leading up to dynamics in decision making about constructing, renovating, and managing sport venues (Friedman & Mason, 2004; Mason & Buist, 2013). These studies focus on venues as sites for traditional events (including sports, concerts and conventions) that began as physical proceedings and only later expanded to digital distribution. E-sports, however, constitute a product traditionally experienced digitally expanding to physical spaces, leading to differing sport
consumption motivations and requirements for successfully planned events (Lee & Schoenstedt, 2011), which leads up to the emergence of new stakeholder groups and shifted landscape packed in traditional sport venues.

Stakeholder Theory and Methods

Broadly, stakeholders can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). Stakeholder theorists suggest that organizations need to better satisfy stakeholder needs and balance stakeholder interests for a long-term development (Clarkson, 1995; Freeman, 1984; Frooman & Murrell, 2005; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). In this study, we will apply stakeholder analysis through three critical steps: identifying stakeholders and their interest and influences, differentiating between and categorizing stakeholders, and investigating stakeholder relationships (Reed et al., 2009).

To facilitate the stakeholder analysis, we employ a case study research method and use Staples Center in Los Angeles, California to explore stakeholder relationship dynamics surrounding e-sports tournaments. Staples Center provides an ideal case site as it not only hosts traditional professional sporting events but also has hosted various e-sports events and has developed concrete plans to cater to e-sports stakeholders. Examples include having more signage and ushers, replacing floor seats with beanbags, providing gamer-minded menu offerings inside the arena and at nearby restaurants, and adding luxury boxes that are packed with computers for gaming during intermission (Dave, 2016). Focus groups with the venue managers and initially identified key stakeholders involved in e-sports tournaments (through news articles) will be conducted to brainstorm stakeholders, their interests, influence, and other important attributes. Snowball sampling will then be used to identify new stakeholder categories. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted for in-depth insights to stakeholder relationships and to triangulate data collected in focus groups. To facilitate qualitative interview data analysis, open coding and axial coding will be applied to explore the dynamics underlying focal venue—existing arena stakeholders—new e-sports stakeholders (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Research Implications

This study is still in progress; thus we do not discuss our results and discussion in this abstract but will present them at the conference. We feel that there are three major contributions the study makes. First, we will add a new dimension to existing stakeholder literature by exploring relational dynamics amongst the focal organization, existing stakeholders, and new stakeholders. More specifically, we investigate how the focal organization’s coordination of new stakeholders’ claims would influence its relationships with existing stakeholders. Second, this study investigates a changing stakeholder landscape around arena management in a new e-sports tournaments context, which has been rarely discussed in sport management literature. Third, we hope our study can provide some practical implications for traditional sport venue managers in developing plans and strategies to realize new business opportunities through hosting e-sports events in the digital and technology era.